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AN EULOGIUM

IN COMMEMORATION OF

DOCTOR CASPAR WISTAR.

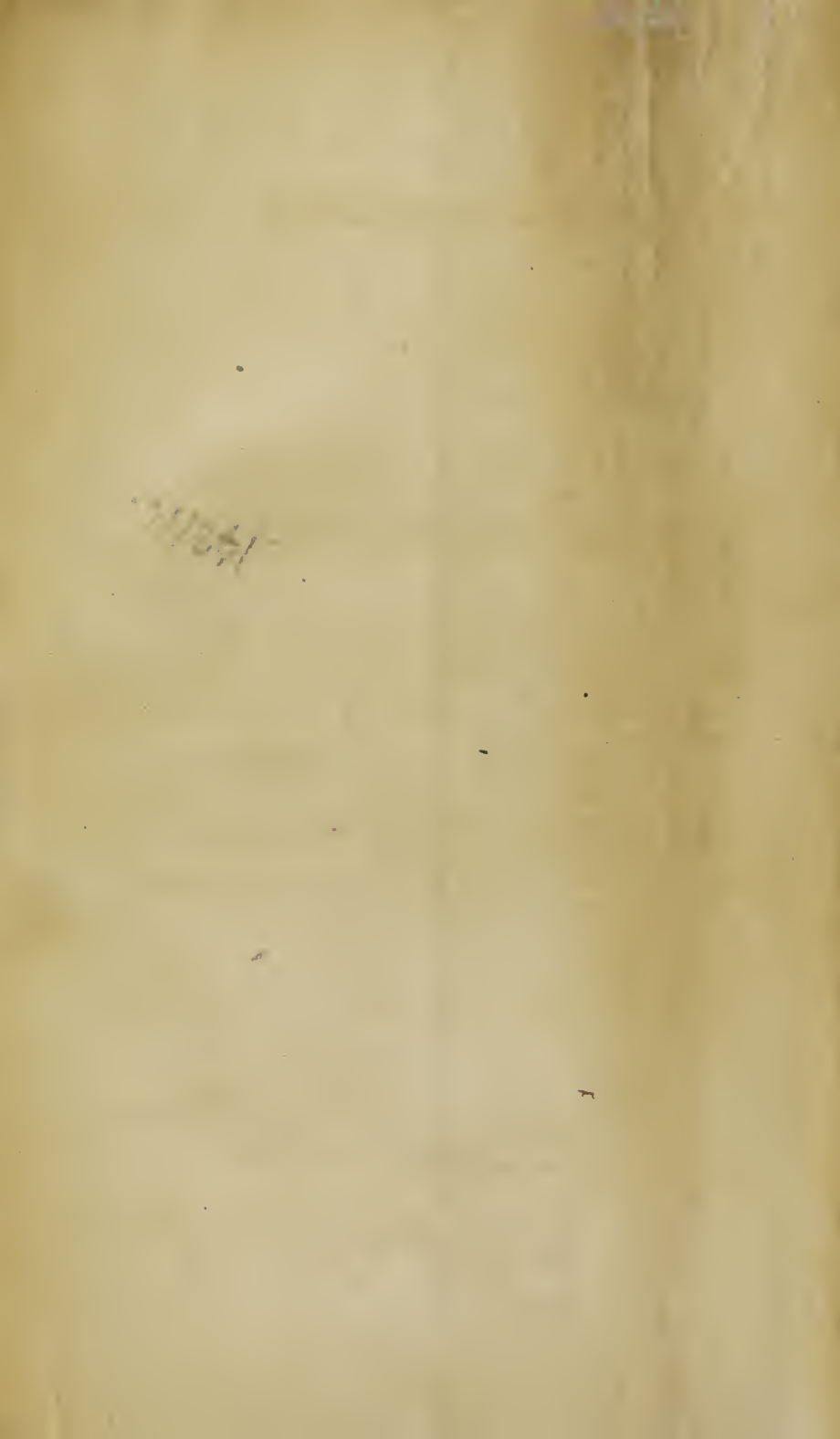
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Printed by J. H. Maxwell

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IN COMMEMORATION OF

DOCTOR CASPAR WISTAR,

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY HELD AT PHILADELPHIA FOR PROMOTING USEFUL KNOWLEDGE.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE SOCIETY,

PURSUANT TO THEIR APPOINTMENT, IN THE GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH IN
FOURTH STREET, IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, ON THE 11TH DAY OF
MARCH, 1818.

BY THE HON. WILLIAM TILGHMAN,

CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, ONE OF THE VICE PRESIDENTS OF THE SOCIETY.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER.

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1818.

At a meeting of the American Philosophical Society, held this evening, it was resolved unanimously, that the thanks of the Society be presented to Chief-justice Tilghman, for his eloquent Eulogium on their late lamented president Dr. Caspar Wistar, in which he has so faithfully expressed the feelings of the Society.

It was also resolved that he be respectfully requested to furnish a copy, to be published under the direction of the Society.

A true Extract from the Minutes.

R. M. PATTERSON, *Secretary.*

March 13th, 1818.

AN EULOGIUM, &c.

Gentlemen of the Philosophical Society,

Fellow Citizens, Friends—

IF your wishes or mine had availed, we should not have been assembled on this solemn occasion. For, surely, never was life more earnestly desired, never death more sincerely regretted, than that of the excellent person, whose character I am called upon to delineate. Witness the alarm which pervaded the city, on the first intelligence of his illness—the friends who thronged his house, with anxious inquiries while hope remained, and departed in silent sorrow when the despairing bulletin announced the approaching crisis—Witness the long procession, which, through crowded streets, followed his mortal remains to their

last abode. But it was the will of God, that he should die, and to that will we submit. The American Philosophical Society, have not assembled, for the purpose of indulging rebellious murmurs or vain regrets. No—they better understand their duty. But deeply impressed with the merit of their deceased president, they have resolved, that his talents and his virtues shall be held up to public view. To him, indeed, this is now of no concern. The breath of praise, so sweet to the living, no longer reaches him. But in a world abounding in temptation, it is necessary that men should be stimulated to virtue, not only by the example of the dead, but by the hope of posthumous honour. For, such is our nature, that we are powerfully incited by the desire of fame, even after death. It has been thought wise, therefore, by most nations, and particularly by the ancient republics, to pronounce Eulogies on the meritorious dead. If wise in them, it is no less so in us. Indeed, we have more need of this custom, than they; because, from the nature of our government, we have fewer artificial excitements to noble actions. We admit of no permanent honours, either personal or hereditary. But the ancient republics had both. We are not without danger of becoming too exclusively, the votaries of

wealth, often acquired by sordid and ignoble conduct. It behoves us, therefore, to counteract this overwhelming influence, by refusing it any weight in the estimation of character. This can be in no way better done, than by fixing a standard in which wealth shall be no ingredient. And in the formation of this standard, posthumous Eulogium will be a powerful engine. Wealth will no longer be thought praiseworthy, when it has ceased to be an object of praise. I am aware of the opinion of a celebrated Roman historian, that this kind of eulogy, although productive of much good, had an evil tendency, in corrupting the truth of history. But this will depend on the use which is made of it. If employed for the purpose of lavishing indiscriminate, or unjust encomium, it will be an evil; if judiciously used, a good. By our Society, this honour has certainly been dispensed, not only with sound judgment, but with a frugal hand. We shall not be accused of corrupting historical integrity, when it is known that but three Eulogies have hitherto been pronounced by our order; and that the objects of these three were Franklin, Rittenhouse, and Priestley. Indeed, it has been the opinion of many, and particularly of him, whose virtues we are about to commemorate, that we

have been too sparing of *just applause*. At the last meeting of the Society which he attended, he expressed his regret that many of our associates had been suffered to sink into unmerited oblivion. In this sentiment he was perfectly disinterested; for he was then in full possession of health and spirits, little thinking that at the very next meeting, his brethren would be occupied with the mournful care of decreeing to him that honour of which he was worthy in the judgment of all. I much fear that I shall be unable to do him justice. Indeed, when I reflect that he was eminent in a profession, of which I pretend not to be a competent judge, I feel conscious that the honourable task assigned to me would have been better performed by several distinguished members who have moved in the same sphere. In one qualification, however, I am not deficient—in zeal for the memory of a man whom I loved and admired. At all events, I felt myself obliged to obey the will of the Society, and trusting to their candour, I shall endeavour faithfully to portray the character of our departed brother.

Doctor Caspar Wistar had the good fortune to descend from ancestors in whom he beheld examples worthy of imitation. His paternal grandfather,

Caspar Wistar, emigrated from the dominions of the Elector Palatine of Germany, and arrived at Philadelphia in the year 1717. He was a man of strong intellect, and applied his life to useful purposes. By his exertions was established in New Jersey, about thirty miles from Philadelphia, a manufacture of glass, supposed to have been the first in North America. His maternal grandfather, Bartholomew Wyatt, emigrated from England with his wife, not long after William Penn commenced the settlement of Pennsylvania. He lived not far from Salem in New Jersey, and was active and distinguished in the affairs of his day, both civil and religious. His father was remarked for firmness of character, and paid particular attention to the morals and religion of his children.

Wistar himself was born in Philadelphia, the 13th of September, 1761. As his parents and ancestors, on both sides, were of the religious Society of *Friends*, he was brought up in their principles, and received his classical education, at a school established by them in this city. I have been able to discover nothing very uncommon in his juvenile character. In quickness of apprehension he was surpassed by several of his companions; but what he undertook he never failed to accomplish by persever-

ance. That he was a good scholar, may be inferred from the knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages, which he was afterwards known to possess. Until the age of sixteen, his faculties were expanding; but the peculiar cast of his genius had not been developed. About that period occurred an event, which called forth the ruling passion, and decided his fate. This event was the battle of Germantown, in the year 1777. His religious principles kept him out of battle, but his humanity led him to seek the wounded soldier, and he was active in assisting those who were administering relief. His benevolent heart was affected by their sufferings; and so deeply was he struck with the happy effects of the medical art, that he determined to devote his life to a profession formed to alleviate the miseries of mankind. Conquerors and heroes—ye who delight in the shout of battle, and exult in the crimson field of victory, contemplate the feelings of this young man, and blush at the contrast! But let us adore the mercy of God, whose mysterious Providence produces good from evil. From the decay of matter, springs up the green herb and the purple flower. From the disasters of Germantown, arises a youth, destined to bind up the wounds of many, and to send forth from his

instructive school, thousands of hands, to open the fountains of health throughout the land.

Firm in his purpose, Wistar applied himself to the study of medicine, under doctor John Redman, a very respectable physician of this city, formerly president of the college of physicians, with whom he remained upwards of three years. During the last year, he attended also the practice of doctor John Jones, an eminent surgeon, who had left New York, in consequence of its occupation by the British army. It was the fortune of Wistar, to gain the esteem of all his preceptors; an infallible mark of his own good conduct. The friendship of two such men as Redman and Jones, was a valuable acquisition; and from that of Jones, in particular, very important consequences resulted. Having gone through the usual course of study, and attended the medical lectures, Wistar offered himself in the year 1782, as a candidate for the degrees of Bachelor of Medicine, in the University of Pennsylvania. Previous to the obtaining of this honour, he underwent an examination in the presence of the trustees of the university. It is said that he acquitted himself, on that occasion, in an extraordinary manner; answering the questions proposed to him, with such uncommon promptness

and precision, as excited the surprise, and commanded the admiration of all who heard him. There was a singularity in this examination of which I have been informed by a gentleman who was present. The faculty of medicine were not all of one theory, and each professor examined with an eye to his own system; of this Wistar was aware, and had the address to answer each to his complete satisfaction, in his own way. Of course the degree was conferred on him.

Instead of entering immediately into the practice of medicine, he determined to avail himself of the advantages to be found in the schools of London and Edinburgh, at that time the first in the world. In this, he displayed his usual judgment. It has been remarked that, with few exceptions, those who have been great in the learned professions, have abstained from practice at an early age. The cause is obvious. The elements of science lie too deep to be attained, without long and patient thought. The mind requires retirement and tranquillity, to exert its powers of reflection to their full extent. But these are incompatible with the bustle, the anxiety, the agitation of active life. There was another reason too, formerly of great weight, though not so now, for finishing a me-

dical education in Europe. Our own schools were in their infancy, and he who had been initiated in others of so much greater celebrity, carried with him a splendour, reflected from the masters under whom he had studied. This had appeared in Morgan, Shippen, Kuhn, and Rush, too plainly to be overlooked by the searching eyes of Wistar. Accordingly he went to England, in October, 1783.

The air of London was unfavourable to his health, which compelled him to make frequent excursions into the country. But no time was lost by these excursions. His investigating mind was busily employed in acquiring knowledge of various kinds; and his familiar letters, during his abode in England, to his friends in America, gave promise of that devoted attachment to science, for which his character was afterwards distinguished.

Having remained a year in England, he repaired to Edinburgh, where he passed his time, not like many young men, in frivolous or vicious amusements; but in study, in attending lectures, in cultivating the friendship of distinguished persons. To act a part like this, requires no small share of good sense and resolution. But to understand the merit of Wistar, it should be known, that in consequence of his fa-

ther's death, he was easy in his fortune, and uncontrolled master of his actions. Great is the danger to which youth is exposed in populous cities. To each is offered the choice of Hercules. The paths of pleasure and of virtue lie open before them. False steps are not easily retraced; for the diverging paths grow wider and wider asunder, until they terminate in the opposite extremes of infamy and honour.

Always intent on improving his opportunities, he made a journey on foot, in October 1785, in company with Charles Throgmorton, esq. and Mr. Ellcock, of Dublin, through part of the Highlands of Scotland, and visited Glasgow, Inverary and Inverness. His character was now rising rapidly at Edinburgh. That he enjoyed the esteem of the great Cullen, appears by a letter, dated January 1786. For two successive years he was elected one of the Presidents of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh. He was elected also President of the society "for the further investigation of natural history." These honours, conferred by a great, a learned, and a proud nation, on a youth, a stranger, one whose country had but just risen into existence, are the surest testimonies of uncommon merit. We contemplate them not only with

pleasure, but with pride. Their lustre is reflected from the man to the country which gave him birth.

About the year 1785, he was received into the house of Doctor Charles Stewart, a most respectable Physician of Edinburgh with whom he lived, during the remainder of the time that he spent in that city. Of this favour he was highly sensible. He always remembered it with gratitude, and spoke of it with pleasure.

In June 1786, he took his degree of Doctor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh; his Inaugural Dissertation, "*de Animo Demisso*" is dedicated to Dr. Franklin and Doctor Cullen; the one, at the head of philosophy in his own country, the other flourishing in Scotland in medical fame. Towards the end of the year 1786, he took leave of Edinburgh, leaving behind him a name long remembered. This is testified by his countrymen who visited that city many years after. His fame flew before him to his native city, where he arrived in January 1787, after an absence of more than three years.

He was now about to enter upon a new and more important scene. Hitherto he had spent his time in preparation. A considerable portion of life had passed away. It was time to be useful—This

was the object of his labours, the wish of his heart. He had formed to himself a sublime idea of his profession. Medicine he considered as an art by which an individual may be a benefactor to the universe, and confer blessings on unborn generations. To this elevation of mind he owed his eminence. For who would submit to the toils and privations which lead to greatness, without exalted ideas of the prize?

With talents matured, his mind enriched with the fruits of study and experience, he now engaged in the practice of medicine with every advantage. His friends were numerous, and his fellow-citizens in general disposed to confide in him. Nor was their confidence disappointed. His old friend and preceptor, Doctor Jones, took the most delicate means, of affording him an opportunity of making himself known. This was all he wanted. His works spoke for themselves. His mind was eminently formed for a profession, in which precipitancy is danger, and mistake is death. No man ever performed his duty to his patients with more scrupulous integrity. He spared no pains in collecting all the symptoms from which the disease might be ascertained. His visits were long, his questions numerous and minute. He paused before he decided, but was seldom wrong—and

his mind once satisfied, he was not easily moved from his purpose. In consultation with his brethren he was courteous and attentive; never overbearing, but always stating, with modest firmness, the result of his own reflections. His patients he never failed to attach to him. How indeed could it be otherwise, when to the sedulous attentions of a Physician, was added the sympathy and anxiety of a friend. Though much given to hospitality, he never neglected the duties of his profession. Being eminent, both in medicine, and surgery, his practice soon became so extensive, that he was in the habit of walking ten miles daily. He would often rise from the convivial table to visit his patients, and request his friends to remain with his family until his return. Yet the pleasure of pleasing others seemed an antidote to fatigue, and enabled him, generally, to be the most animated of the company. To a man thus acting, success is certain. Fortune, who intoxicates the weak, had no power over his steady mind. He knew that nothing is stationary in life. No man continues great without continued labour. All nature is in motion; and he who does not advance, will surely recede. By unremitting exertions, he always kept the ground he had gained, and still pressed forward to the pinnacle of

his profession. His labours were sweetened with reward, and his spirit cheered with public favour.

In the year 1787, he was appointed Physician to the Philadelphia Dispensary, a useful and charitable institution then recently established. In the same year he was elected a member of the college of Physicians, and of our society. In 1788, to his other good fortune was added domestic happiness, by his marriage with his first wife, Isabella Marshall, daughter of Christopher Marshall of this city. In 1789 he was elected Professor of Chymistry in the "college of Philadelphia." This appointment he did not accept without great hesitation. Philadelphia had then the misfortune to be divided between two rival schools; the faculty of medicine of the College and that of the University of Pennsylvania. He saw and lamented the consequences of this division. It was his wish to unite, in one great institution, the talents of the city. But finding that the period of union had not yet arrived, he accepted the professorship offered him by the College, in order to preserve an influence, to be exerted at the proper season, and in this purpose he was not disappointed; for he had the satisfaction of contributing largely to the much desired union, which was afterwards effected.

In 1790, he was struck with affliction, in the loss of a wife whom he tenderly loved. This severe misfortune, he bore like a Christian, who feels calamity, but submits to the dispensations of Providence. Resignation to the will of the Almighty, and an active discharge of worldly duties, are the only sources of consolation, in afflictions like this. These were the resources of Wistar. He did not then foresee, that great as it was, this loss would one day be repaired by a companion no less worthy of his affection than the one he so justly mourned.

In the memorable summer of 1793, when the Physicians were the forlorn hope which stood between the pestilence and the people, he had nearly lost his life—he did not escape the awful visitation, but was fortunate enough to recover from it. In the autumn of the same year, he was chosen Physician to the Pennsylvania Hospital. In that celebrated institution, his services were principally in the department of surgery, where he found ample scope for the exercise of his humanity. I have been assured, from unquestionable authority, that in attendance on the sick, he knew no difference between the rich and the poor. It requires no small knowledge of the human heart, no little experience in the business of the world, to appreciate

this trait of character according to its real value. It is easy to applaud the conduct of the *good Samaritan*—we all do it—and the Priest and the Levite, had they heard the parable, would have done the same. But when brought to the test, they cast their eyes on the wounded traveller and passed by.

The Rival Faculties of medicine being united in the University of Pennsylvania, Wistar was elected, in January 1792, adjunct Professor of anatomy, midwifery, and surgery, with the late Doctor Wm. Shippen, one of the fathers of the medical school. Surgery and midwifery were afterwards erected into several professorships; Shippen and Wistar retained anatomy, and on the death of Shippen, in 1808, Wistar was placed, as sole Professor, in the anatomical chair.

It was here that the scene of his greatest excellence was exhibited. In many departments of science he was conspicuous, but here pre-eminent. Here he exerted all his genius and strained every faculty of his mind. His heart and soul were in the object. No pains, no money were spared, to render the lecture complete—and he succeeded; for in the opinion of able judges, he might well bear a comparison with the most celebrated Professors in existence. In

language he was sufficiently fluent, and when a little excited, even eloquent, and by happy allusions to agreeable objects he contrived to scatter flowers over a field, not naturally of an inviting aspect. But his great aim was to render his demonstrations perfectly intelligible, and this he always accomplished by dwelling upon his subject, until he perceived that it was clearly understood by his pupils. In the communication of his ideas he had a facility never attained but by great masters. Too much praise cannot be given him for the liberality with which he provided the necessary apparatus. His expenses in procuring every kind of drawing or model which could represent the various parts of the human body, were greater than can be conceived by those who have not been informed. The increase of his class keeping pace with the fame of the Professor, it was found impossible to demonstrate to several hundred students at once, the structure of all the minute organs. He had recourse, therefore, to models, which gave an exact representation of the small parts of the human structure on a magnified scale. This was not an original idea of Wistar; but he extended this mode of instruction so far beyond any thing which had been before practised, and its effects, under his lessons, were so luminous

and happy, that we can scarce withhold from him the merit of invention. There was another peculiarity in his course of lectures, which should not pass unnoticed. The general class was divided into a number of sub-classes, each of which he supplied, at his own expense, with materials for acquiring a thorough acquaintance with the human skeleton; a subject, which is allowed by all to be the foundation of anatomical knowledge. With all these advantages, a student, who diligently attended his lectures, could scarce fail to become an anatomist.

He published a few years ago, a *System of Anatomy* adapted to the use of students, the character of which, I shall give, in words better than my own, obligingly communicated by a Professor of our medical faculty.* “It is a model for an elementary work. “The style is simple, plain, intelligible—the descriptions brief and accurate—the arrangement lucid, “and the whole work altogether worthy of his talents. “However numerous the writings of anatomists, I “have no hesitation in declaring this by far the most “easily understood, and by far the best fitted for the “purposes intended.”

* Doctor Dorsey, Professor of *Materia Medica*.

Anatomy has been so much studied both by the ancients and moderns, and so many excellent works have been published on the subject, that any *discovery*, at this time of day, was scarcely to be expected. Yet, it is supposed to be without doubt, that Wistar was the first who observed and described the posterior portion of the ethmoid bone in its most perfect state, viz. with the triangular bones attached to it. Of this he has given an accurate description in the volume of our Transactions now in the press. On the subject of that discovery he received, a few days before his death, a letter from Professor Sœmmering, of the kingdom of Bavaria, one of the most celebrated anatomists in Europe, of which the following is an extract: “The neat specimen of the sphenoid and ethmoid bones, are an invaluable addition to my anatomical collection, having never seen them myself, in such a perfect state. I shall now be very attentive to examine these processes of the ethmoid bone in children of two years of age, being fully persuaded Mr. Bertin had never met with them of such a considerable size, nor of such peculiar structure.”

By the class of medical students Wistar was universally loved and respected. It has been said, that during the period of his lectures, they increased in

number from one to five hundred. To ascribe this prodigious increase to him alone, would be doing injustice to the dead. Let me not adorn his recent grave with laurels torn from the tombs of others. But without violating that modesty which he loved, I may be permitted to say, that no individual contributed more than he, to raise the school to its present eminence. The institution, it must not be dissembled, has received a rude shock in the loss of this invaluable Professor. And this reflection is the more serious, when we take a short retrospect. A few years have robbed us of Shippen, and Woodhouse, and Rush, and Barton, and Kuhn. And now Wistar is gone, the last of that old school, by whose labours the fabrick has been reared so high. But I do not despair. Our loss, although great, is not irreparable. Not that a Professor is to be expected, who can at once fill the vacant chair with all the splendour of his predecessor—but by treading in his footsteps, and following his example, we may flatter ourselves, that ere long his successor will approach if not equal his excellence. Among the other Professors are still to be found unrivalled talents, and as a body, they merit and possess the public confidence. They will exert all their powers to keep the lead which has been taken in the medical field.

Far from their breasts be the ignoble passions of jealousy or envy. But every nerve must be strained in the noble race of generous emulation. Nor have we any fears for the event. They have the start, and, we trust, they will be first in at the goal.

In December 1798, Wistar married the amiable lady who now laments his loss—Elizabeth Mifflin, niece of the late governor Mifflin. Of his first marriage there is no issue. In his last he was blessed with many children, only three of whom remain.

In the year 1809, knowing the prejudices that obstructed the progress of vaccination, he suggested the plan of a society for circulating the benefit of that noble discovery which has immortalised Jenner. And in this he had the pleasure of finding himself seconded by a number of public spirited gentlemen, who associated themselves for that useful purpose—so great has been their success, that by their means, upwards of eleven thousand persons had been vaccinated in this city and liberties, and the district of Southwark, previous to their annual report in January last—nor is that all—for, encouraged by their examples the corporation have generously provided by law for the gratuitous vaccination of the poor in the city.

In May 1810, he resigned his office of physician to the Hospital. In what estimation he was held by the managers, will best appear by their own resolution, entered on their minutes. “The conclusion of Dr. Wistar, to withdraw at the present time, was unexpected and very much regretted by the managers, who would have gladly embraced the opportunity of giving to a long-trying, experienced, and faithful practitioner, a further proof of their confidence in his skill and abilities, by re-electing him to the office he has filled more than sixteen years successively, with great reputation, if he had not prevented them, by declining to serve any longer. Under these impressions, the managers reluctantly part with Dr. Wistar, being thankful for his past exertions to serve the institution, and for his kind offers to advise and assist, if there shall be any particular reason to require it, on any future occasion.”

In July 1794, he was appointed one of the censors of “the College of Physicians,” a very learned incorporated society—which office he retained to the time of his death.

Having taken a view of his public and private services as a physician, let us now consider him as a man of general science and literature. His classical learning, gained at school, was much enlarged by

subsequent reading. He became an excellent scholar. The Latin, he understood so well, as occasionally to hold conversations in it. He acquired enough of the French language to converse without difficulty, and was well acquainted with the German. In the character of an accomplished physician, is combined a variety of sciences. Anatomy was Wistar's fort, but he was well versed in Chymistry, Botany, Mineralogy, and History, in all its branches. As appurtenant to his profession, he had reflected deeply on the human mind. Its connexion with the body, the manner of its being acted on by matter, and the cure of its maladies, he considered as desiderata in medicine. That these objects had engaged much of his thought, is evident. For, when a student at Edinburgh, I find that he proposed questions concerning them, to Doctor Cullen; his Thesis, "*de Animo Demisso*," shows the same train of thinking, and in the last valedictory address to his pupils, he exhorts them to investigate the subject, and to make themselves familiar with the writings of Locke, Hartley, Priestley, and Reid.

As an author, he has not left much behind him. He sometimes wrote anonymous essays, which were published in the papers of the day, and others which had his signature, appeared in the Transactions of the

College of Physicians, and in the printed volumes of our Transactions. Among the latter is a paper in which are detailed some very curious experiments on the evaporation of ice. This subject has been since ably developed by others, but it is believed that Wistar was among the first who attracted to that object the attention of the public. His most considerable work is his system of Anatomy. Great literary works are not to be accomplished, without more leisure than is allowed to men engaged in extensive professional business. Yet such persons may do much for the promotion of literature. And this was the case with Wistar. What he could himself, he did, and encouraged others to do more, who had more opportunity. His ardent zeal for science made him anxious to promote it by all means and on all occasions. His house was open to men of learning, both citizens and strangers; and there is no doubt that at the weekly meetings, which took place under his hospitable roof, were originated many plans for the advancement of science, which were afterwards carried into happy effect. In consequence of ill health, he had been for some years gradually retiring from the practice of medicine, and had his life been spared a little longer, he would probably have confined himself

to his lectures, and indulged those studies, which he loved, and for which he would then have found leisure. He had completed the Biography of his friend and colleague, Dr. Shippen, and had it in contemplation to write a Memoir on the life of the late professor Barton. He was industriously inquiring into the natural history of our western country, and had commenced a collection of subjects for the investigation of Comparative Anatomy, to which he was incited by his friend Correa da Serra, whose name is identified with science both in Europe and America. He had been accustomed to correspond with men of distinguished talents, both at home and abroad. Among these are found the names of Humboldt and Sœmmering, in Germany; Camper, in Holland; Michaud, in France; Sylvester, in Geneva; Doctor Pole and Doctor Thomas C. Hope, in Great Britain; and in the United States, of the late president Jefferson, Correa da Serra, Warren, and most others conspicuous in literature. In 1815, he was elected an honorary member of the Literary and Philosophical Society of New York, and the same honour was conferred on him by other Literary Institutions.

In the year 1795, he was elected Vice-President of our society, and in 1815, on the resignation of Mr. Jefferson, he succeeded to the chair of his illustrious friend. I need not call to your recollection with what propriety, what decorum, what suavity of manners, he discharged the duties of this honourable station. Such was his courtesy, that he seemed anxious even to divest himself of that superiority, which the order of business rendered necessary. He was assiduous in attending committees. He was one of the first and most strenuous supporters of the Historical and Literary Committee, instituted by the society about two years ago. With what ardour did he excite them to industry, in collecting, ere too late, the fleeting materials of American history? The meetings of this committee he regularly attended. It was their custom, after the business of the evening was concluded, to enter into an unrestrained conversation on literary subjects. There, without intending it, our lamented friend would insensibly take the lead; and so interesting were his anecdotes, and so just his remarks, that drawing close to the dying embers, we often forgot the lapse of time, until warned by the unwelcome clock, that we had entered on another day. To the business of the society in general, he was al-

ways attentive, and his zeal for its interest could not be surpassed. Considering his conduct in every point of view, I may truly say that he gave universal satisfaction.

The understanding of Wistar was rather strong than brilliant. Truth was its object. His mind was patient of labour, curious in research, clear, although not rapid in perception, and sure in judgment. What is gained with toil is not easily lost. His information was remarkably accurate, and his tenacious memory held fast what it had once embraced. In youth he had given some time to poetry, and in maturer age he had not lost his taste for it. His favourite poets were Pope and Milton. Among those of more modern date, he preferred Cowper and Burns. But the inclination of his genius was decidedly for graver studies. Of time, and nothing else, he was avaricious. As he rode in a carriage, he often read, and when confined by sickness, he was fond of being read to by his family. But on such occasions he chose his book, which was always on some useful subject. On its being once proposed to him to hear a celebrated novel which had just come out, he rejected it, declaring, as he had often done before, that to listen to works of mere fiction, was little better

than loss of time. He had ranged over most of the objects of nature, in all her varieties; but next to his profession, the subjects in which he seemed most to delight, were the history and productions of America. To have been born an American, he esteemed a blessing, and to possess a knowledge of all her resources and advantages, seemed to him a duty which he owed to himself and his country.

It remains to consider our deceased associate as a private citizen and a man. Public office he neither held nor sought, although enjoying the affection of him whose favour was fortune. This disinterested friendship does honour to both. To the liberty of his country he was firmly and warmly attached. Concerning the defence of liberty against foreign aggression, there can be no difference of opinion. But when the question is, how best to preserve it by our own Institutions, we are agitated by frightful discord. In such circumstances, it is not only the right but the duty of every man to speak his sentiments with candour and firmness; never forgetting, that to err is human, and that he himself, or his friend who opposes him may be mistaken, without blame. Such was the conduct of Wistar, who preserved his principles, without sacrificing his friendships. His opinion, on all

subjects, carried deserved weight. I owe it to candour, therefore, to say, that I have always understood he agreed in sentiment with those who have held the government, since the presidency of Mr. Adams. But the harmony in which he lived with friends of both parties, and the respect and affection which friends of both parties entertained for him, afford a memorable example, well worthy the serious reflection of those who suppose that political intolerance is essential to political integrity.

I turn with pleasure from the field of politics to objects of a more delightful nature; the piety, the goodness, the philanthropy of our lamented friend. Vain is the splendour of genius without the virtues of the heart. No man who is not *good* deserves the name of *wise*. In the language of scripture, folly and wickedness are the same; not only because vicious habits do really corrupt and darken the understanding, but because it is no small degree of folly to be ignorant that *the chief good of man is to know the will of his Creator and do it*. Wistar lived and died in the religious principles of those who have adopted the modest and endearing name of *Friends*. The people of this respectable society have preserved more of ancient simplicity in dress and manners,

than any among us. They once outnumbered all other religious societies in Pennsylvania. But although that has long ceased to be the case, yet, fortunately for us, they are still powerful enough to exert a silent influence, checking the overflowing tide of luxury, which threatens to deluge the land.

It is difficult for a physician to be punctual in attendance on public worship. But if Wistar was not punctual, it was not because he was insensible of the duty, but because he was called by other duties to the assistance of his fellow mortals in another place. He, therefore, desired that his family should be regular in attendance at *meeting*, and he himself went when the situation of his patients permitted. In his devotion, as in every thing else, he was void of ostentation. But that his mind dwelt much on that important object, I can have no manner of doubt. When a youth, at Edinburgh, his friend, Dr. Charles Stewart, made him a present of a neat edition of the Bible, in two small volumes. These he carefully preserved to the day of his death; and it was his custom, when he travelled, always to take one of them with him. This circumstance was well known to his children, the eldest of whom frequently accompanied him in his excursions, and could not fail to impress on their

tender minds, a veneration for the book which their father so highly prized.

It has been asserted that the study of natural philosophy tends to infidelity and even to atheism. To plead the cause of philosophy before this society would be worse than waste of time. But as we are honoured with the presence of numerous strangers, it may not be improper to say a few words in answer to this popular objection. It is not foreign to my subject; because, if there be truth in the assertion, instead of recommending our late president, as an example worthy of imitation, we should point him out as a delusive meteor, whose false light might lead the unwary to the pit of destruction. I shall say but little; for were I to permit myself to enlarge on the boundless subject, I should soon exhaust my own strength and your patience. In the sacred scripture, the repository of the revealed will of the Deity, we find it written, that God has not left himself *without witness* among the heathen; that is to say, his visible works bear witness to his existence and his attributes. And it is most true. The most barbarous nations are struck with the evidence, and acknowledge the existence of a power superior to man. But those stupendous works, which, in silent majesty, proclaim

their Maker, do not disclose half their testimony to an ignorant observer. Nay, if not understood, there is danger of being misled by them. The untutored savage beholds the splendour of the sun, and perceives that from the warmth of its rays proceeds the growth of the innumerable vegetables which give beauty and comfort to the world. Ignorant of its nature, he considers it as an intelligent being, and worships it as a God. What would be his sensations, could the darkness of his mind be instantaneously illumined by philosophy; how great his surprise at perceiving that this resplendent orb, the object of his adoration, was no more sensible than the brute earth on which he trod? With what astonishment, and gratitude, and awe, would he contemplate that great Being who fixed the sun in his orbit, and clothed it with light? If we pass from the savage to civilized man, the effects of increased knowledge will be of the same nature. The most ignorant among us understand that the sun was created by God. To every one, therefore, it is a mighty witness of the existence and power of its Maker. But thousands and thousands see nothing in the sun, but the source of light and heat. Suppose now, their minds to be endowed with the knowledge of all its wonderful power—Suppose them to view it

as the centre round which revolve, in rapid and ceaseless motion, the immense bodies which form the planetary system, all bound, by its attractive force, to one immutable path through the trackless void—Suppose them, moreover, to be informed, that the countless stars which bespangle the firmament, are probably other suns, enlightening and supporting other systems of inhabited worlds!—Suppose, I say, the mass of mankind to have ideas like these, would not the celestial bodies, to them, bear stronger testimony of the mighty God? And exactly the same argument is applicable to every thing animate and inanimate in this terrestrial globe—from intelligent man to the scarce moving shellfish—from the towering oak to the twining ivy—from the sparkling diamond to the dusky coal—from the massy rock to the fine sand—from the troubled ocean to the glistening dew-drop—from the loud tornado to the whispering zephyr—whatever floats in air, or swims in water, or rests on its unfathomed bed—whatever flourishes on earth's green surface, or lies hid in her capacious bosom—all the elements of matter, with their unnumbered varieties—all, all bear witness to their almighty Maker, and witness stronger and stronger as they are better and better understood—for every thing

is perfect, every thing miracle. How then can it be that as evidence increases faith should diminish? The thing is impossible. When the understanding is convinced, it is not in human power to withhold belief. But, it has been said, that the pride of man perverts his understanding—that, intoxicated with his own little discoveries, he forgets his Maker, and with the fool, says in his heart, *there is no God*. In theory this is not true; nor is it in fact. That there are melancholy instances of extraordinary intellect destroyed by intense study, is not to be denied. And candour would ascribe to that cause, the atheism attributed, perhaps unjustly, to a late celebrated French astronomer. But such cases are rare. On the contrary, the instances are without number, where reason has maintained her seat, and the belief in God has been confirmed. To give the highest examples at once, I shall mention Newton in England, and our own Rittenhouse, whose minds the mighty Maker of the universe seems to have touched with celestial fire, in order that they might unfold his works and render their testimony plain and irresistible. Nor is it true, that knowledge begets pride. This is proved by the two great men I have named, as remarkable for modesty as for depth of science. It is only the

half learned who are insolent. They are proud, because they are ignorant. But the truly wise are most sensible of their own imperfection. They prostrate themselves before that supreme incomprehensible Being, whose nature the aching senses in vain endeavour to penetrate; and, when it pleases him to reveal himself, they receive with humility and gratitude those truths which human understanding could never have attained. Away then with the ungenerous aspersion, and let bigotry confess that the door of true philosophy opens directly into the temple of true religion.

To Wistar, philosophy was the handmaid of religion—she elevated his soul and warmed his affections.

After loving God with all our heart, the next great commandment is to love our neighbour as ourself. Were I asked to point out the most prominent feature in Wistar's character, I should answer, without hesitation, benevolence. It was a feeling which seems never to have forsaken him, beginning, as it ought, with his own family, and extending to the whole human race. Nor was it that useless sympathy which contents itself with its own sensations. His charity was active, his hand ever seconding the feelings of

his heart. Next to religious obligations, and the inviolable sanctity of truth, he impressed on the minds of his children the duty of abstaining from wounding the feelings of any human being. And he made them frequently repeat the precept of our Saviour, "love one another." Even his person gave evidence of philanthropy—his eye beamed good will, and his whole air brought strongly to my mind what Tacitus says, in his description of Agricola: "at first sight you would have believed him to be good, and wished him to be great." This ruling sentiment threw grace over his actions, and inspired his conversation with a charm. He never assumed—never displayed his own superiority. On the contrary, he led the conversation to subjects in which others excelled. The pedantry of technical language he despised, and listened, with patience and politeness, to the observations of inferior understanding. It has been observed that there is no book so dull but something good may be extracted from it. Wistar applied this principle to men, and possessed the remarkable talent of drawing from every one some useful information. From a young man, much attached to him, who had an opportunity of knowing him well,* I have received

* Doctor Horner, who was employed by Dr. Wistar as an assistant in his Anatomical Lectures.

the following description. “ He was one of the
 “ purest republicans, both in conduct and conversa-
 “ tion, that I have ever known. No one was ever
 “ sensible, by his conduct, of any difference of rank;
 “ and as regards conversation, he was as careful not
 “ to oppress an ignorant neighbour by its abstruse-
 “ ness, as not to put an humble one out of counte-
 “ nance by an air of superiority.”

That the kindness of his manner had something uncommonly attractive, I can myself bear witness. My acquaintance with him commenced at a period of life when the heart no longer yields to the illusions of fancy. Yet, before I had time to be convinced of his goodness, I felt myself drawn towards him by an irresistible charm. I have taken pains to derive the character of this excellent man from authentic sources. One communication, from a very near female relation,* who knew his domestic habits, and even the secrets of his heart, I will give in the words I received it, which I should but injure by attempting to amend. “ His domestic habits were uncommonly
 “ mild and unassuming. Benevolence and charity
 “ characterized all his actions. In the cause of his
 “ friends he spared no exertion, either by day or by

* Mrs. Bache, sister of Dr. Wistar.

“ night. His house was always open to them, and
 “ the evening society, which frequently gathered
 “ round him, was one of the greatest enjoyments of
 “ his life. His extreme modesty makes it difficult to
 “ particularize any act of his which ought to be men-
 “ tioned; for, although to do good was his ruling
 “ passion, his particular acts were rarely known,
 “ except to the persons immediately concerned. To
 “ merit his services was the sure passport to obtain
 “ them. In the cause of suffering humanity his feel-
 “ ings were always ardent. During his last illness,
 “ he recommended to a friend the cause of the abo-
 “ rigines of America; and the last sentence he was
 “ heard to pronounce, was, ‘ I wish well to all man-
 “ kind.’ Disinterestedness characterized his life,
 “ and it may be doubted whether so extensive a prac-
 “ tice ever yielded so little emolument.”

On the death of Dr. Rush, Wistar succeeded him
 as president of the society for the abolition of slavery.
 The object of this society was congenial to his mind.
 Considering the situation of the southern states, the
 subject is delicate. But, certainly, the introduction
 of slavery into our country is an event deeply to be
 lamented, and every wise man must wish for its gra-
 dual abolition.

For the Indians of America he seems to have felt a particular kindness. He admired their eloquence, lamented their desolating wars, and earnestly sought for the means of meliorating their condition. Having once inoculated an Indian woman for the small pox, her husband had fears for the event. Indeed there was some cause for fear, as the woman refused to submit to the proper regimen. The anxiety of the Doctor was extreme. She recovered; but until the danger was over, he declared, that on no occasion had he been more oppressed with the responsibility of his profession.

The gratitude of Wistar was remarkable. Services done, or even intended, he always remembered; but injuries he was ready to forget. In a letter written at Edinburgh he declared, that he had determined to forgive every thing to a friend or near relation, and expressed his belief, that it would contribute greatly to happiness to extend forgiveness to every one. This sentiment gained strength with time, and at length ripened into a governing principle.

To say such a man was a dutiful son, a kind brother, a most affectionate husband and parent, would be matter of supererogation. In the loss of his children he was peculiarly unfortunate. To those

who remained, he was passionately devoted. As the circle of affection lessened, its warmth increased.

But had he no failings, no infirmities? Undoubtedly he had, for he was a man. But I may truly say, that they fell not under my observation, and I trust I shall be excused if I have not been anxious to search for them.

His health, during the few last years, was interrupted by several alarming attacks. He was subject to great irregularities of pulse, and there were strong symptoms of disorder in the chest. A collection of water was apprehended. But the fact was, that a small ossification had taken place between two of the semi-lunar valves of the aorta. About the 14th of January last, he was seized with a malignant fever attended with symptoms of typhus. Art proved unavailing, and he sunk under the disease, after an illness of eight days.*

We have lost him in the strength of life and vigour of intellect—too soon indeed for his family and his country; but not too soon for his own happiness or fame. For, honourable age is not that which is measured by length of time, or counted by number of days. But wisdom is the gray hair unto man, and un-

* Dr. Wistar died, 22nd January, 1818.

spotted character is fulness of years. Protracted life would have been embittered by bodily pain—the frailties of nature might have dimmed the lustre of brighter years—or death, which had spared him, might have desolated his house, and left him solitary and cheerless to encounter the infirmities of age. Happy then wert thou, Wistar, in death as well as life. Thy work is done—thou art gone to receive thy reward. Thou diedst in the full career of usefulness and fame—thy heart overflowing with charity—surrounded by friends, loving and beloved. Domestic affection watched over thy pillow, and thy parting looks rested on the objects dearest to thy soul. Death hath affixed to thy character the seal not intrusted to mortal hands. What though the strict equality of thy religious society forbid thy undistinguished ashes to be marked by even a modest stone, yet shall the good hold thy virtues long in remembrance, and Science write thy name in her imperishable roll. The last generous emotion of thy benignant spirit, shall be reciprocated. All mankind shall wish happiness to him, who dying, wished happiness to all.



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